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Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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Michigan Flyer expands service

BY JIM WALLINGTON

Indian Trails capped a banner month of June when its Michigan Flyer subsidiary gained local approval to receive a $595,000 federal grant to finance expansion of service between East Lansing and Ann Arbor.

The increase from eight to 12 round trips, expected to begin this fall, was paved when the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission in mid-Michigan late last month (June 26) reversed blockage of the grant when a member absent from the May 9-9 vote broke the tie when he voted yea.

Opposition to the funding came from the Capital Region International Airport in a bitter campaign. Airport officials claimed the four extra trips to Metro Airport would lure their passengers, thus making tougher to convince airlines to add local flights.

Michigan Flyer insisted it was seeking to take private drivers off the road, not capturing regular flyers out of Lansing. They also said they carried thousands of riders between the college campuses in East Lansing and Ann Arbor seperate from airport traffic. Those runs extend to and from Metro airport.

See page 8 for more bus news.

BIKES ON BOARD. League of Michigan Bicyclists Advocacy and Policy Director John Lindenmayer loads a bike on board Amtrak Train #350 in Kalamazoo on May 15. The bicyclists, the Michigan Department of Transportation and Amtrak were testing the feasibility of accomodating bikes on Michigan trains. Special racks were installed in the cafe car to hold the bikes. (Photo by Derrick James, Amtrak)

Amtrak tests bike service in Michigan

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

On May 15 the League of Michigan Bicyclists (LMB) participated in Amtrak's Roll-on Bicycle Demonstration on Wolverine Train #350.

For this demonstration Amtrak removed several tables and booths in the café car and installed four angle bike stands to allow safe and secure storage while in transit.

"We have been campaigning for this the past few years," LMB Advocacy and Policy Director John Lindenmayer said. "We're excited to see it happen."

After a test period, Amtrak will evaluate whether it makes sense to retrofit a sufficient number of café cars to allow a bicycle rack on every train operating in the Midwest hub. Only after a sufficient number of café cars are converted, roll-on bike service will be offered on a regular basis.

"We were told they need to convert six or seven café cars before they can offer the service," Lindenmayer said.

He was told by Amtrak officials when the program rolls out, bikes would only be allowed on a train by a reservation. He said that Amtrak has not decided if there would be an additional charge.

The demo event was coordinated by Amtrak and the Michigan Department of Transportation and it was aimed at generating feedback from bicyclists on a new prototype bike rack design Amtrak is in the process of field-testing.

Bicyclists boarded and disembarked train #350 at various legs along the Wolverine service route. Bicyclists participated at stops in Chicago, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Royal Oak.

Amtrak currently does not

(See BIKES, page 3)

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Clippings from newspapers and magazines must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent in by e-mail should be in JPEG format.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions.To subscribe to this publication, join MARP by filling out the application below. All MARP members receive a copy of this publication sent to their home or business.

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About MARP…

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a consumer advocacy group to improve intercity rail and bus service, improve local transit and encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code, 501(c)(3) as a charitable educational organization. Dues and donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS code.

MARP is an all-volunteer organization. Its membership consists of passengers and citizens who want a viable, balanced transportation system in Michigan. We can all use the help we can get!

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Station improvements progressing along

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

Since 2009, an unprecedented $71 million has been proposed in improvements to passenger train stations in Michigan. Here's is a brief update on the status of the projects which were originally reported in the Autumn 2011 edition of The Michigan Passenger:

Ann Arbor — A proposed $25 million transit center has been scaled down and it is still in the planning stages. Controversy over the proposed location caused the University of Michigan to back out of plans to co-locate a parking structure at the transit center.

Battle Creek — A $3.8 million extensive refurbishing of the station was completed in 2012 and it is now open.

Dearborn — Construction is moving along quickly on the $25 million facility on Michigan Avenue next to Greenfield Village. The facility should be completed by years end.

Durand —A $285,000 project to pave the parking lot and improve the drainage was completed in 2012.

East Lansing — A groundbreaking ceremony was held last year for a new $6.3 million facility at the current station site.

Grand Rapids — Nearly a year and a half after the ceremonial ground breaking, work began in earnest this spring on the $4.6 million facility.

MOVING ON UP. The passenger bridge rises next to the tracks at the Dearborn Intermodal Station in early June. Below, most of the Troy station's main structures are completed. (Photos by Steve Sobel.)

Pontiac — The $1.4 million transit center on Woodward Avenue opened in 2011.

Troy — The $8.5 million facility has been scaled down to $6.5 million after considerable political wrangling in late 2011 and early 2012. Construction is moving along quickly and this transit center should also be completed by year's end.

BIKE

(Continued from page 1)

allow bicycles on board most of their Midwest routes, including all that pass through Michigan.

For the past several years the LMB has actively lobbied Amtrak to change their policies and urged them to modify their existing cars with bike racks to help bridge the 'last mile' problem many commuters and potential commuters face.

In March 2012, the LMB delivered a petition with over 3,000 signatures to Amtrak Chairman Thomas C. Carper asking to allow roll-on bicycle service.

Carper responded that he was in favor of roll-on bicycle service and he felt that there was enough demand among the travelling public to justify equipping trains with bicycle racks.

However Carper said that there is currently not enough equipment yet available to add the service.

From left to right, LMB's Vice Chair Rory Neuner, Amtrak Government Affairs Director Derrick James and LMB's Advocacy and Policy Director John Lindenmayer show off the bike racks. (Photo by LMB)

"Amtrak has placed an order for 130 new, single-level cars to supplement the existing fleet and allow retirement of some cars beyond their serviceable life, mostly on long-distance routes operating east of Chicago. This order is being constructed by CAF USA of Elmira, New York, and includes 55 new baggage cars and 25 new baggage-dorm cars. These two types of cars will be equipped with bicycle racks. It has not yet been determined how bicycles will be accepted and stored. We will look to the cycling community to help us craft a service that meets the needs of travelers within the operational constraints of the railroad environment," Carper said.

Modeled after California cars, the new coaches will provide 12 spaces for bikes and potentially space for up to 16 additional bikes within the new baggage cars, said Derrick James of Amtrak's Government Affairs Department.

Grant applicants seek new connection and faster service in west Michigan

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

The city of New Buffalo has taken the lead in applying for $58.3 million in federal grants to improve Amtrak travel times and to increase frequency of Amtrak service to southwest Michigan.

New Buffalo submitted a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) June 3 and it is billing itself as the lead party of the Western Michigan Intercity Passenger Rail Connectivity and Expansion Initiative. The city is partnering with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Amtrak and CSX.

The TIGER grant will help fund a $72.9 million project that includes designing a connecting track between the Amtrak-owned tracks to CSX tracks on the east side of New Buffalo and building a 19 mile-long passing track from Niles to a location northeast of Dowagiac.

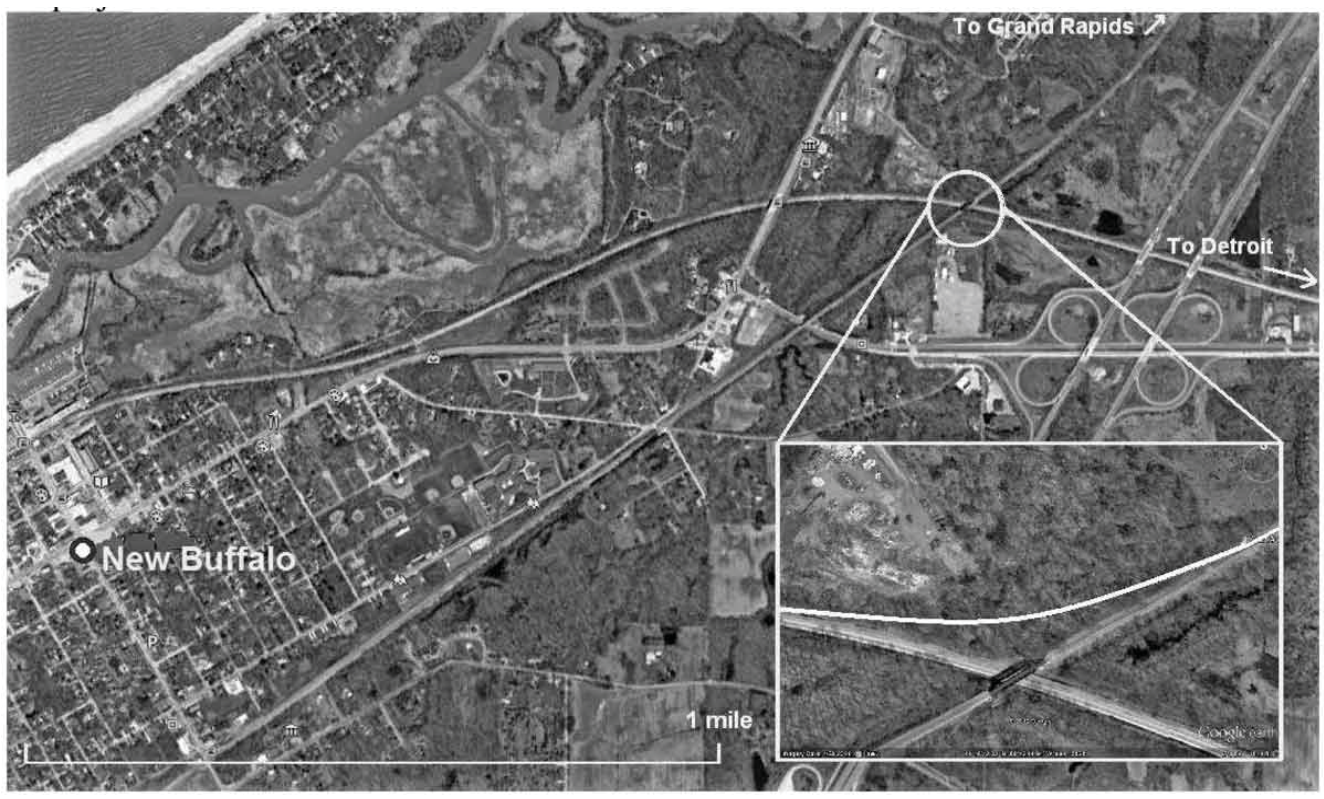
MDOT will contribute an additional $14.6 million towards the project in order to meet the required 20 percent local match for the TIGER grant.

"This grant application, if approved, will provide jobs, improve intercity passenger rail service, and contribute to the economic development and tourism of not just New Buffalo, but the whole state by integrating Michigan's passenger rail services," New Buffalo Mayor Migs Murray said.

The city is requesting that $2 million of the grant go towards the design and environmental assessment study of a track that will connect the east-west Amtrak line between Detroit and Chicago to the north-south CSX line between Porter, Indiana, and Grand Rapids.

The connecting track will allow the Pere Marquette to stop at the New Buffalo Amtrak station. Since 2009, the Pere Marquette has not stopped in the city because it is routed over CSX tracks on the east side of the city. The station was moved from the CSX tracks to the Amtrak tracks in October of 2009.

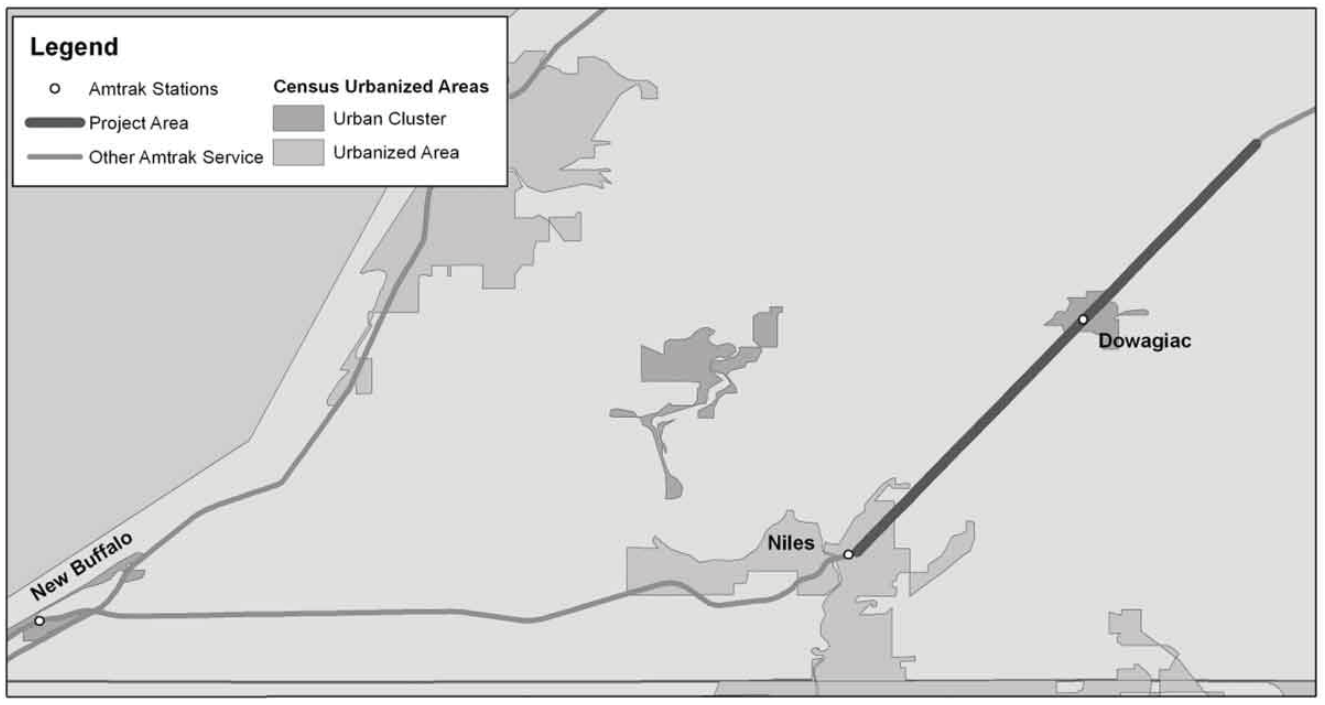
In its grant application, the city said that travelers will benefit from the resulting increased passenger train frequency by adding the city to the Pere Marquette route. It said that many of its residents work in downtown Chicago and that many of its visitors come from Chicago.



Above, an aerial photo shows the proposed connecting track between the Amtrak and CSX track in New Buffalo. The wavy line that extends from the left to the right sides of the picture depicts the existing Amtrak tracks. The diagonal line that extends from the lower left to the upper right indicates the existing CSX tracks. The enlargement box shows the proposed connection between the two ralroads.

Below, the bold line shows the proposed passing track on the Amtrak line between Niles and to the northeast of Dowagiac. Currently this segment of the railroad has two short passing tracks which forces one train to slow down or stop while the opposing train passes. The new track will allow trains to pass at full speed.

(Graphics by Western Michigan Intercity Passenger Rail Connectivity and Expansion Initiative)



The city said that the connecting track will eliminate the need to put Positive Train Control (PTC) signal equipment along 23.5 miles of CSX tracks between northern Indiana and New Buffalo in order to meet federal guidelines mandated by 2016. The Amtrak line between Porter Indiana and New Buffalo already meets federal guidelines for PTC.

The city also said that the connecting track will allow travelers on Amtrak's Chicago-Port Huron Blue Water train and Amtrak's Detroit-Chicago Wolverine trains to use New Buffalo as connecting point to travel to Grand Rapids.

The city estimates it will cost $20 million to build the connecting track but it decided to ask for only design and environmental funding at this point due to limited funds available per fiscal year.

The majority of the grant request is for the construction of 19 miles of passing track between Dowagiac and Glenwood Road which is northeast of Niles.

That stretch of track currently has two passing sidings totalling three miles long and it requires one train to either slow-down or stop while an opposing train passes.

The proposed configuration will allow trains travelling in opposite directions to pass each other at 110 miles per hour.

New Buffalo officials estimate that the shorter passing times will equate to a savings of 10 minutes on each train's schedule. Officials also say that the passing siding will better accommodate the planned increase in frequency of Wolverine trains by the end of the decade.

Currently five of the eight trains using the Amtrak Michigan Line are scheduled to meet between Niles and Kalamazoo.

Big Court Loss for Amtrak

On July 2nd, Amtrak took a big hit in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The case, American Association of Railroads (AAR) vs. Amtrak, was complicated, so what follows will focus only on the main element.

The National Limited

By John DeLora

The facts were straightforward. In 2008 Congress passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). Section 207 of PRIIA empowered Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to develop jointly performance measures and standards to enhance Amtrak's existing right of priority over freight trains. The AAR sued in federal court, arguing that this section gave Amtrak unconstitutional powers.

At issue was whether Amtrak is a government entity. If not, could the government give a private corporation the power to regulate private sector companies?

Amtrak had successfully argued in the lower court that it was a government entity, citing the facts that it board is appointed by the President and that its funding comes almost entirely from Congressional appropriations.

The AAR argued that the law creating Amtrak stated explicitly that Amtrak "shall be operated and managed as a for profit corporation" and "is not a department, agency or instrumentality of the United States Government." It was also noted that Amtrak had private, sector common shareholders (The private shareholders are the railroads who took Amtrak stock in lieu of making startup payments to Amtrak when it was created in 1971).

The Court recognized that "Amtrak is a curious entity that occupies the twilight between the public and private sectors." However, the Court held that the enabling statute was the controlling factor, and that Amtrak was, in fact, a private corporation. That in turn made it unconstitutional for Amtrak and the FRA to have jointly the power to write regulations affecting the operations of private companies. In effect, Amtrak would have the power to regulate itself. The Appeals Court's opinion was pretty thorough in its repudiation of Amtrak arguments.

The decision invalidates Section 207 of PRIIA including the standards which were written jointly by Amtrak and the FRA. It also means that Amtrak's lawsuit against Canadian National is thrown out as well.

What now? Three options remain:

1. Amtrak can appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, but chances that the Court will hear the case are not good.

2. Amtrak can ask Congress to re-write Section 207 and allow Amtrak advisory input (which the Court said would be legal). PRIIA was passed with a bipartisan majority, so this is possible, although the current polarization in Congress is not a good omen.

3. Amtrak can do nothing. If this is the course taken, it is likely that on-time performance will revert to the low percentages that were common before the enactment of PRIIA.

To read the opinion for yourself, go to U.S. Court of Appeals, District of Columbia, then to "Recent Court Decisions," and scroll down. The cases are in the order they were decided; this case was decided July 2, 2013.

Ann Arbor fair shows off future commuter train

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

The 13th annual Mayor's Green Fair held June 14 in Ann Arbor included a passenger train with equipment that may someday serve the city.

A multitude of companies and agencies arranged to have a special train made up of one upgraded former Chicago Metra Commuter bi-level gallery car and a Great Lakes Central Railroad locomotive to be displayed at the fair. The passenger car was representative of 22 cars refurbished by the Great Lakes Central Railroad for future commuter service in Southeast Michigan.

At a press conference before the start of the fair, Ann Arbor Mayor John Hieftje emphasized that Ann Arbor-to-Detroit commuter rail is the focus right now, and WALLY is something that might happen years down the road.

"WALLY is still a viable plan, but it is not my emphasis," he said. "It is not something I think is going to happen anytime soon, but I think it is something we will turn to at some point down the road, and it is probably a good thing to continue long-range planning for."

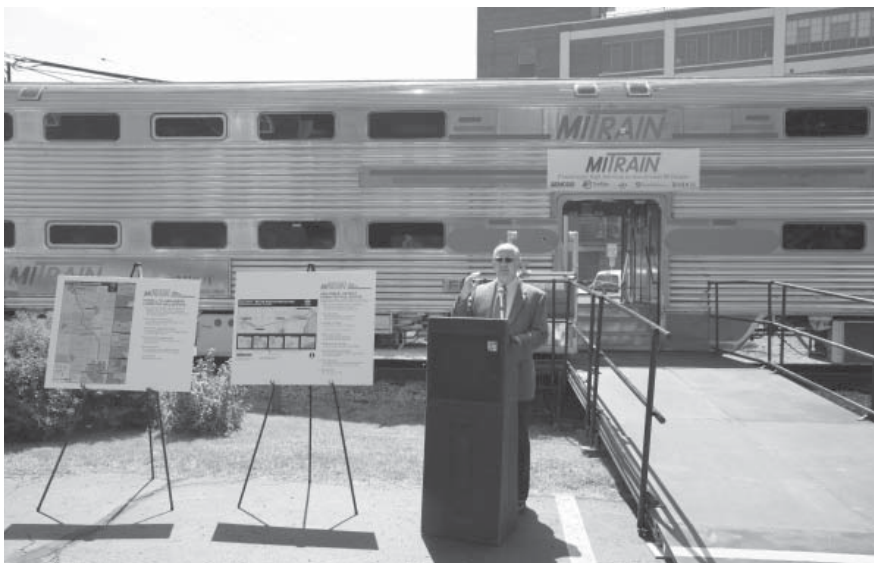
As for the proposed service between Ann Arbor and Detroit, Hiefje said he's expecting the new Southeast Michigan Regional Transportation Authority to assume responsibility.

"This isn't Ann Arbor's project," he said. "This is the state of Michigan's project. This is the Southeast Michigan RTA's project. And we're one of the willing participants — along with all the cities along the line. Everybody's enthusiastic about it. But we have no plan to put general fund money into this."

Hieftje said it's his expectation that the RTA will be the controlling organization if Ann Arbor-to-Detroit commuter rail service is going to move forward.

"This project is frankly going to need the support of the Regional Transit Authority that has just been made real by the state," he said. "We've been working with them and we will continue to work with them, and we are having some real positive conversations coming out of the work that we've been doing. And if it's embraced by the RTA, this can become a reality in a few years."

The press conference was held at Williams and First streets which is near a site on Washington Street where the city hopes to extend the rail commuter service to some day.



Paul Tait, Executive Director, Southeast Michigan Council of Government, speaks in front of the special commuter train. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

This year's Mayor's Green Fair was held on Main Street and celebrated the community's environmental leadership as exhibited by citizens, nonprofits, government and businesses.

Main Street was closed to motor vehicle traffic and it was opened to displays of environmental information, "green" products and entertainment.

A live band, Kevin and the Glen Levens, powered its amplifiers with solar energy while local vendors sold organic food.

The fair was divided into three events:

• The Environmental Leaders area which showcases from more than 50 environmental organizations, government agencies and participating businesses. They provided information and host hands-on activities for all ages, crafts, and live birds of prey demonstrations.

• The Clean Energy Expo which had displays such as alternative fuel vehicles, green building materials, solar energy installations and renewable energy installations. and much more!

• The Green Commute Area showcased a variety of ordinary and innovative sustainable transportation choices including commuter trains, AATA buses, Zipcars, and bikes, including the circumference/conference bike.

Steve Sobel contributed to this report.

From the Board Room: Connecting the Dots

BY HUGH GURNEY

From my perspective, the major objective of the Route Enhancement Committee is to assure that all citizens of Michigan have access to public transportation with convenient schedules to all other points in Michigan and beyond.

To me, that translates to more and faster trains running on time to more points in Michigan. For less densely settled areas, it means frequently scheduled intercity buses connecting with trains at multimodal stations.

It also means local transit that connects with both intercity trains and intercity buses, so that a citizen in Oakland County can take a local bus to Pontiac, Troy or Royal Oak, connect with a fast train to Kalamazoo, board an intercity bus to Charlevoix, then catch the ferry to Beaver Island. Or this person might find it more convenient to take a local bus to Pontiac or Southfield, an intercity bus to Grand Rapids, a connecting intercity bus to Charlevoix, and the ferry to Beaver Island.

While the day is still far off when Michigan will have a truly robust, seamless public transportation network, we are making progress. Trains began running at 110 mph between Kalamazoo and Porter, Indiana, in February, 2012. The 110 mph zone is scheduled for extension to Battle Creek by the end of 2013. The enhanced speed zone will be extended to the Detroit City line by 2015. Work is currently underway on a flyover in South Chicago that will eliminate one frustrating bottleneck. The Michigan Department of Transportation is leading a multistate study on the best location for a passenger train only route from Porter, Indiana into Chicago Union Station. New passenger coaches are on the way for Michigan and other Midwest states and new passenger locomotives will be ordered this summer.

In 2012, a completely renovated intermodal station opened in Battle Creek. Intermodal transportation stations are under construction in Troy/Birmingham and Dearborn. A new rail terminal will soon make the Grand Rapids Union Station truly intermodal. The entry of Indian Trails into the Detroit Metropolitan area has doubled intercity bus service out of the Pontiac Transportation Center. A totally new transportation center has been funded and is being planned for East Lansing. Ann Arbor has ambitious plans for a truly Intermodal Transportation Center.

In June, the Michigan Department of Transportation hosted the first public showing of commuter rail equipment which could whisk commuters from Ann Arbor to Detroit along the same tracks being upgraded for Amtrak trains. These trains could easily service Chelsea and Jackson to the west and Royal Oak, Birmingham/Troy and Pontiac to the north of Detroit. This same commuter equipment could also provide service on the proposed Ann Arbor-Howell route, affectionately known as WALLY.

As to passenger friendly schedules, the Route Enhancement Committee continues to push for an early morning train from Kalamazoo to Chicago and a late evening departure from Chicago back to Kalamazoo. We also envision an early morning train from Kalamazoo eastbound to Detroit/Pontiac and intermediate points and a late evening train from Pontiac/Detroit back to Kalamazoo. We also advocate a morning train from Chicago to Grand Rapids which would return to Chicago in the early evening. We support a new rail junction just north of New Buffalo permitting trains to and from Grand Rapids and Holland to serve the New Buffalo station and connect at that point with trains to and from eastern Michigan.

We feel that rail service connecting Detroit, the state's largest city, with Lansing, our state capital, and Grand Rapids, the second largest city, is feasible. That service could be easily extended to Holland.

We are pleased with the continuing expansion of Amtrak Thruway Bus service to more and more points in Michigan. Rail passengers can now connect at Milwaukee with Indian Trails to Menominee, Escanaba, Marquette and Houghton; from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids, Traverse City, St. Ignace and Sault Ste. Marie; and from Battle Creek to Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, Cheboygan, Mackinaw City and St. Ignace. Jackson is now an Amtrak Thruway stop along with East Lansing, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Detroit on the route that connects with eastbound Amtrak trains in Toledo. Effective in June, 2013, Amtrak Thruway passengers from Sault Ste. Marie, Charlevoix, Traverse City and other points can connect with eastbound as well as westbound trains in Kalamazoo. Also effective in June, 2013, southbound passengers on the Indian Trails route along the Lake Huron shoreline will be able to connect with Amtrak at Pontiac. A northbound connection awaits completion of the rail upgrades between Kalamazoo and Dearborn.

New arrival and departure monitors in the Kalamazoo and Battle Creek stations help passengers see the connectivity of local transit, rail and intercity bus. Similar monitors are scheduled for Pontiac in the near future. The Route Enhancement Committee is currently seeking funds to develop an interactive web site where passengers can easily enter a departure address in one city and an arrival address in another community in Michigan and quickly determine how to get there by public transportation.

Much still needs to be done, but we are connecting more and more dots to the intercity public transportation grid.

In addition to chairing the Route Enhancement Committee, Hugh Gurney serves as MARP's Secretary.

Ahoy, MARP Mateys!

MARP Members, Spouses, Family Members, and Friends

Have fun attending MARP's August 10 meeting aboard a real (but retired) railroad ferry - the S.S. City of Milwaukee. The ship is designated a National Historic Landmark and is permanently berthed on Lake Manistee in the northwest Michigan vacation community of Manistee. We will meet on the rail car deck of a vessel that once shuttled rail cars between Muskegon and Milwaukee for the Grand Trunk Western Railroad. Members of the City of Milwaukee's preservation group, meeting the same weekend, will attend our meeting and have invited us to attend their events.

You are invited to treat this meeting, and the weekend of Aug. 9-10-11, as part of your summer vacation. Decide now to attend, save your gas money, and get ready to enjoy a weekend of history and good company.

As a special treat, we have the opportunity to experience lodging aboard this 1920's Great Lakes steamship. Most rooms are located in the historic passenger area which features beautiful oak paneling and polished brass. Other rooms are located in the Engineer's hallway. You can fish from the ship, just enjoy lounging on the deck under the stars, or watch a movie in the observation room.

Passenger, crew, and officer rooms are available at $25.00 for a single, $15.00 per extra person in a room + 11% tax. Options include: 8 rooms with two single bunks, 8 rooms with one single bunk, 1 room with four bunks. Don't dawdle - there are 30 bunks total and the one room with a double bed is already rented. When gone, rooms will be offered aboard the former Coast Cutter Acacia at $25.00 person + tax.

To make reservations aboard ship:

- Call 231-723-3587 during business hours on Mondays and Thursday-Sunday.
  Or go online to request booking information at http://carferry.com/contact
- Visit the www.marp.org?p=4628 for a listing of Manistee area lodging alternatives to the ferry.

2013 MARP Meeting Schedule

July 20 – Flushing Depot Museum

August 9-10-11–Historic train ferry City of Milwaukee berthed and open in Manistee. See page 6 for more.

September 14 – Durand Union Station for the annual meeting –Kevin Keefe of Trains magazine is the speaker

October 12 –Open

November 2 or 9 – Albion Amtrak Depot

December – executive meeting only

Check www.marp.org for additions and changes to this schedule.

MARP meetings are held in various places around the state in order to give everyone a chance to participate.

Meeting announcements are posted on the website www.marp.org and include program information and driving directions. Meeting minutes are archived on the website so you can review past topics discussed.

BUS

(Continued from page 8)

Not all news is good news

The mid-day westbound Thruway bus now departs Flint and East Lansing two hours earlier, creating a 2-hour and 45-minute layover in Battle Creek for Wolverine #353 passengers. Amtrak agents indicate reduced Thruway ridership as a result. The previous wait was a more reasonable 54 minutes. Indian Trails cited the need to connect with Greyhound runs out of Chicago.

Indian Trails, a private, family-owned company based in Owosso, has been in the transportation business for more than century. It also operates extensive charter service, local services at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, as well as The Michigan Flyer service from East Lansing.

Promoting Passenger Rail Travel

May was a busy month for MARP volunteers across the state.

Above MARP photographer Steve Sobel took this photo of National Train Day in Ann Arbor on May 11 with (left to right) Clark Charnetski, MARP Vice Chair Larry Krieg, Ren Farley and MARP Secretary Hugh Gurney handing out refreshments to travellers.

The middle photo also taken by Sobel shows MARP Chair Bob Tschibein and Mike Frezzel at Railroad Days in Durand on May 18.

In the photo below taken by Kelly Weber, (left to right) MARP Governmental and Public Affairs Coordinator John Langdon, Congressman Fred S. Upton, Ken Ratzlaff, State Rep. Aric Nesbitt, and Floyd Nelson were on hand for a proclamaiton supporting National Train Day at Bangor May 11.

Motorcoach service improves in June

BY JIM WALLINGTON

June was a whirl-wind month for the inter-city motorcoach industry in Michigan and passengers were the big winners, even those who want to ride Amtrak.

Here is what riders are now getting that was not available prior to June 1:

• Through bus service from Detroit to St. Ignace along the Lake Huron route thanks to Indian Trails move into the Detroit-Flint market. Greyhound dropped out as a result.

• A second round trip between Detroit and Bay City thanks to the Indian Trails move that provides morning and afternoon departures from both cities, allowing people to take advantage of the morning buses, conduct business or visit the destinations and return the same day.

• More Thruway connections throughout Michigan, including breakthroughs at Kalamazoo and Pontiac. These came after a short-lived scare that Thruway was being cutback in Michigan. Thruway service is an arrangement that allows Amtrak to issue connecting tickets between its trains and bus companies to expand service to cities on the bus routes. Indian Trails is the major Thruway carrier in Michigan.

An Indian Trails motorcoach stops at the Pontiac Intermodal Station on June 1, its innaugral day of service. (Photo by John DeLora)

The Thruway picture:

1. On the west side of the state Indian Trails riders from such points as Petoskey, Charlevoix, Traverse City and Cadillac now can reserve and print a Thruway ticket to Kalamazoo where they can board the Blue Water to Battle Creek, East Lansing, Flint and Port Huron. Or if want to wait three-and-a-half hours they board Wolverine #354 to Jackson, Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Detroit and Pontiac.

   This routing has long been advocated by MARP executive committee member Don Monteith, who recently celebrated the fact that Indian Trails created a stop in his hometown of Charlevoix a few months ago to connect to the Beaver Island ferry.

2. Indian Trail riders from such northern points as Cheboygan and Alpena soon will be able to use an Amtrak ticket to Pontiac, wait 45 minutes and board the 5:40 p.m. Wolverine to cities along southern Michigan and into Chicago. MARP hopes a northbound Thruway connection from Pontiac will be instituted after track rehabilitation is complete between the Detroit area and Kalamazoo on the railroad that the state purchased from Norfolk Southern.

3. Thruway service was extended to Mackinac City and St. Ignace on the Lake Huron run. Indian Trails hopes that increased ridership from Thruway will help preserve this route that has been under the microscope of MDOT officials who approve subsidies for Indian Trails runs in northern Michigan.

4. Indian Trails Thruway connections survive at Kalamazoo to Niles and Chicago; between Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, East Lansing and Flint; and from the U.P. to Milwaukee. This is in addition to the East Lansing-Jackson-Ann Arbor-Dearborn-Detroit Thruway service to and from Toledo to connect with the Capitol Ltd. and the Lake Shore Ltd. Amtrak contracts with Trinity Transportation of Detroit for this service. MARP has advocated the service be extended to Grand Rapids.

• Passengers are getting more options in East Lansing to Chicago and Ann Arbor via Greyhound, which is now competing in the mid-Michigan market directly with Indian Trails/Michigan Flyer and Megabus as well as Amtrak. Greyhound moved into that market after Indian Trails jumped into the Detroit-Pontiac-Flint routing. Greyhound dropped its Detroit-Flint run in mid-June.

An Indian Trails official said his firm historically stayed out of the Detroit-Flint market to avoid conflict with Greyhound, which served the market for years. But Greyhound was not making convenient connections for Indian Trails passengers north of Flint, he said.

• Megabus continues to be an actor in Detroit-Chicago market but has cut back on some of its overnight runs via East Lansing and Grand Rapids. Some days it has two round trips and three on other days. Officials are closely watching the impact of Megabus on Amtrak ridership in East Lansing and Grand Rapids.

(See BUS, page 7)

Working on the Chelsea siding

This tamping machine is used to tamp down newly laid ballast or stone under each railroad tie near Chelsea.

The three mile long passing track that begins east of town to a point two miles west of town called CP Lake is being rehabilitated and brought back into service. The track will reduce delays for Amtrak's Wolverine Service because it gives dispatchers another option to schedule meets between trains.

This passing track rehabilitation is one part of the plan to rebuild the tracks between Kalamazoo and Dearborn in order to increase speeds from 79 MPH to 110 MPH in many areas.

Crews have begun work on rebuilding the mainline between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek and plan on completing that section by the end of this year. (Photo by Steve Sobel)